

MANY PEOPLE THINK OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) AS A “STRESS DISEASE”

THE RESULT OF OVERWORK, NO EXERCISE, TOO MANY COCKTAIL LUNCHES, TOO MUCH SMOKING, BAD DIET, AND A THOUSAND OTHER THINGS WE DO IN OUR TENSE SOCIETY. THE FACT IS, DOCTORS DON'T KNOW WHAT CAUSES HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, EXCEPT IN A FEW RARE CASES. WHAT THEY DO KNOW IS THAT NEARLY 65 MILLION AMERICANS HAVE IT AND NEARLY 1/2 ARE WOMEN. AND ONLY A SMALL PORTION OF ALL THOSE WITH THE DISEASE ARE TREATED ADEQUATELY.

• WHY DOES IT MATTER? BECAUSE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE IS A KILLER. IT LEADS TO HEART FAILURE, STROKE, KIDNEY DAMAGE AND MORE. • THERE ARE NO RELIABLE SYMPTOMS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, BUT, AS A WOMAN, YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SOME CLUES THAT MAY HELP YOU DEAL WITH THIS DISEASE.



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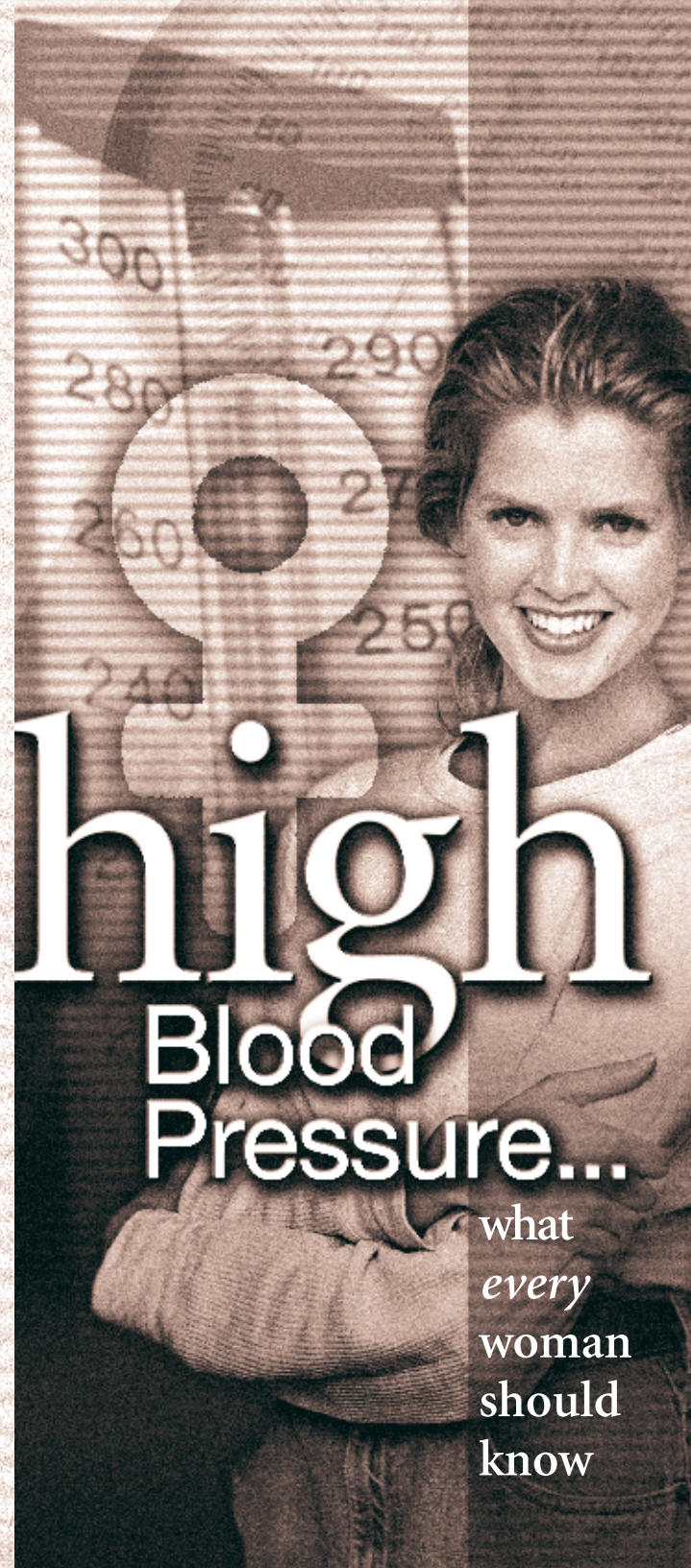
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For more information on issues related to heart disease and stroke,
call the American Heart Association at (800) 242-8721
or visit www.americanheart.org.



IF YOU'RE TAKING THE PILL

Doctors have determined that taking contraceptive pills is associated with high blood pressure in some women. This is more likely to happen if you are overweight, have had hypertension during pregnancy, or have a predisposing condition, such as mild kidney disease or a family history of high blood pressure. So it's a good idea to ask your doctor to measure your blood pressure before prescribing the pill, and then have your blood pressure checked every six months or so. The combination of contraceptive pills and cigarette smoking may be especially dangerous in susceptible women.

IF YOU'RE OVERWEIGHT

Being overweight or gaining a lot of weight increases the possibility of developing high blood pressure. This is one reason why it is important to maintain normal weight throughout your life.

IF YOU'RE AFRICAN-AMERICAN

Nobody knows why, but studies show that African-American women—even very young women—are much more susceptible to high blood pressure than Caucasian women. Not only is the disease more common among black women, but it often tends to be more serious. In fact, more than one in every three African-Americans over 18 is estimated to have high blood pressure.

WHAT YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE LEVEL MEANS

Find out what your blood pressure numbers are. A reading of less than 120/80 mm Hg is considered normal.

If you have a reading of 120-139/80-89 or higher, there are three things a physician may do: continue observation to see if high blood pressure persists; begin non-drug treatment, such as cutting down on your salt intake and asking you to lose weight; or initiate drug therapy, if there are other risk factors, or if the non-drug treatment does not work.

Remember, high blood pressure can be controlled and continued treatment can prevent premature strokes and heart attacks.

What every woman should know about high blood pressure

IF YOU'RE PREGNANT

Physicians usually keep a close watch on blood pressure during pregnancy, because hypertension can develop rapidly in the last three months and is dangerous to both mother and baby if not treated. This kind of hypertension usually disappears after delivery. If it doesn't, it should be controlled with careful, long-term treatment, as recommended for all other hypertension.

For women who already have high blood pressure, pregnancy may or may not make the condition more severe. Careful treatment promotes a normal pregnancy and a normal baby.

AFTER MENOPAUSE

As a woman grows older, her chance of having high blood pressure becomes greater than a man's. Although you may have had normal blood pressure most of your life, the chance of your having high blood pressure increases considerably after menopause.



IF YOUR FAMILY HAS A HISTORY OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

If your parents and other relatives have had high blood pressure, there's a good chance that you have it or may develop it. And if you have it, it's quite possible that your children may also develop it. Like adults, children should have regular blood-pressure checks.

THE CURE FOR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

There isn't any cure, not yet, anyway. The important thing is that high blood pressure is controllable. To control your blood pressure, you've got to participate as part of a health-care team. Your doctor, nurse and other team members can't do it alone—and neither can you. You must all work together.

You may have to take medication every day, perhaps for the rest of your life, and there may be other treatments, such as losing weight, using less salt, getting more exercise and limiting alcohol intake.

Think about the possible consequences of untreated high blood pressure. Don't take life-or-death chances with a disease you can control.

IT'S NO MYSTERY

Blood pressure is caused by the pumping of blood from the heart into the arteries.

Taking blood pressure is simple and quick. The cuff placed on the arm records the two measurements in a blood pressure reading, such as 122/74 mm Hg (Millimeters of mercury). Systolic pressure, the top number, is the higher pressure and is measured during the heart's contraction. Diastolic pressure is the bottom number. It is the minimum pressure and occurs when the heart is relaxed between beats.

Blood pressure often rises when you are nervous or excited, but normally it goes down again almost immediately.

Sustained elevation is abnormal. This is why physicians usually take a series of readings before treatment.

